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**STRATEGIC MYOPIA:
THE VISION AND FAILURE OF ELEUTHERIOS VENIZELOS**

BY

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19960610 023

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: Strategic Myopia: The Vision and Failure of Eleutherios Venizelos

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

DATE: 15 April 1996

PAGES: 25

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Eleutherios Venizelos was the preeminent Greek statesman of the modern era, and one of the most famous European diplomats of the early twentieth century. Venizelos possessed many of the traits of a great strategic leader. He had a profound strategic vision -- the unification of the Greek people and restoration of Greece as an equal among the nations of Europe. His vision was shared by the people he led, who six times voted him premier. As a potential strategic leader, Venizelos possessed many imposing qualities: he was a charismatic visionary, a skillful orator, a brilliant diplomat, a successful politician, and an inspiring personality.

Yet Venizelos was not a strategic leader. This paper examines his actions in detail, and concludes that he time and again failed to anticipate the second and third order consequences of his actions. As a result many of his most brilliant successes were quickly tarnished by developments he had failed to foresee. This study demonstrates how this strategic myopia dimmed the luster of what otherwise might have been one of the great political luminaries of the modern era. It reviews many of the critical decisions he made, and how the consequences of those choices resulted in the broader failure of the Venizelos legacy.

INTRODUCTION

Eleutherios Venizelos,¹ the most prominent Greek politician of the modern era, is little known outside of Greece today. Yet the seminal role he played in reordering the political scene in the Balkans reverberates a half century later. Scholars have a deeper appreciation of his greatness than does the common man. One twentieth century historian described him as "Greece's most illustrious statesman since Pericles."² Another termed him "the greatest man Greece has produced since antiquity, a great political genius, raised to the pedestal of a national symbol,"³ while a third characterized him as "the dominant figure of southeastern Europe . . . a genius in diplomacy, a humane and far-seeing statesman, and an unchallenged leader of his fellow countrymen.

Venizelos made incontrovertible contributions to the Greek people and the modern Greek state. Under his leadership the Greek nation more than doubled in size and population. As premier he revitalized the legislative process, strengthened the judiciary, promoted civil rights, reduced brigandage, implemented land reform, improved the military, stifled corruption, reduced tax evasion, reformed the press, and adopted legislation to protect workers. Abroad Venizelos created the Balkan Alliance through brilliant diplomacy, an achievement earlier thought impossible given the intractability of the problems in that area. His revitalized army defeated the previously invincible Turks. Years later he sought and found rapprochement with Turkey, the traditional enemy of the Greeks, and gradually drew Greece out from beneath the shadow of the Great Powers (Britain, France, and Russia) so that the nation might take its place as an equal in the diplomacy of Europe.

But the triumphs of Venizelos and his followers were not unmitigated successes. The Greek leader could envision a future desired end state, but he seemed unable to identify the

ramifications of actions taken in pursuit of that goal. In short he overlooked second and third order consequences of his policies. In reviewing the life and career of Eleutherios Venizelos we should therefore examine his accomplishments in this light. Early triumphs were met with later failures. Stunning successes had negative consequences which reverberated for years or decades. Brilliant maneuvers set in motion forces antithetical to Venizelos' stated objectives. Those unanticipated consequences are as much a part of the Venizelos legacy as the many enduring contributions he made to the advancement of the Greek people and nation.

This paper will examine the career of Greece's most revered statesman to demonstrate that despite an enduring strategic vision, Eleutherios Venizelos was not a great strategic leader. His failure to foresee the second and third order consequences of his actions and policies mitigate against draping him in this mantle. For the true strategic leader must possess a broad vision, not a myopic one which ignores consequences, as did Venizelos.

BACKGROUND

Like most great leaders, Venizelos was driven by a strategic vision, in this case, one shared by the majority of the Greek people inhabiting southeastern Europe and Asia Minor at the dawn of the twentieth century. The vision "was known to the Greeks as the *Mégali Idéa*, the Great Idea, of recovering Constantinople and restoring a Greek Christian empire in the lands so long occupied by the Turks."⁴ The Great Idea had its origins deep within the consciousness of the Greeks, and was based upon a desire to restore the Greek people and Greek culture to the preeminent position they enjoyed during the era of Byzantium. In that long past golden age, Greek culture dominated the Mediterranean world as Pericles, Plato, Sophicles, Thucydides, Homer and their contemporaries lit up the darkness of a world struggling towards the light of civilization. The era of Greek cultural and political domination had ended centuries earlier, and

ultimately been replaced by the cruel rule of the Ottoman Turks, Moslem infidels whose capital was located in Constantinople, spiritual center of the Greek Orthodox church.

Young Eleutherios likely saw the embodiment of the Great Idea during his childhood on Crete. The historical museum there contained a "Dream Map of Greece" which incorporated the Greek speaking portions of Epirus, Macedonia, Thrace, Thessaly, and Asia Minor into the empire of the Hellenes.⁵ Nearly four centuries of Turkish rule finally ended in 1829, when Greece gained her independence. But the victory in the long battle for an Hellenic state was bittersweet. The new nation existed only through the forbearance of the Great Powers, and nearly 80 percent of the Greek people remained minorities under the domination of other regional states, most notably the Ottoman empire.⁶ The Great Idea was still not realized, and was to await a champion for another 80 years until Venizelos entered onto the scene.

Eleutherios Venizelos was born on the island of Crete on August 11, 1864 in the midst of a continuing crisis over the future of the Cretan people. Of Greek origin, the islanders had long suffered under the whip of the Ottomans, who suppressed all efforts of the Hellenes to participate in the governance of the island. Venizelos' father had fought unsuccessfully for Cretan independence in the 1840's and had been banished from the island and seen his property confiscated as a result. Three of his uncles -- the brothers of his father -- had died during that struggle.⁷

Venizelos' father christened him Eleutherios, derived from the Greek word *eleftheria*, which means "liberty" or deliverance from servitude.⁸ Two years after his birth, in 1866, the Cretans once again rose in revolt against the Turks. Turkish troops pushed the Cretans high into the mountains and surrounded them at the Orthodox monastery of Arkadi. With supplies running

low after a lengthy siege by an overwhelmingly superior force of Turks, the Christian prelate of the monastery set fire to the magazine, killing the defenders and many of the Ottoman troops nearby. The story of the martyrs of Arkadi, along with those of his father and dead uncles, were often told to young Eleutherios as he grew to manhood on Crete.

The Venizelos family, while long time residents of Crete, were in fact Greek citizens, and this citizenship was transmitted to Eleutherios. As a Greek he was eligible to study at the University of Athens, where he took a degree in law in 1887. Returning to Crete upon graduation, he was elected to the Cretan parliament (a sop the Turks had thrown the Cretan independence movement a few years earlier) and began his long career in politics. The death of his young wife the following year left him devastated, and he did not seek reelection, retiring instead to the private practice of law.

THE LEADER

Venizelos' first foray into politics is indicative of his career as a whole. He entered and left governments, resigned, was reelected, resigned again, went into exile, returned, and revolted the way other men change socks. He thought nothing of being president one day, seeking self exile the next, and fomenting revolt on the third. Throughout his public life Venizelos remained supremely confident in his ability to win the hearts of the people, and regain the reins of power he laid down with such abandon.

This was the first of Venizelos' major strategic flaws. His revolving door style of leadership, constant scheming, willingness to bend the rules, and ability to manipulate the political system were at odds with his vision of political modernization. "He leapt without looking; he took steps in the dark."⁹ And in so doing he established a tradition in Greek politics

which has persisted to the present day: revolving governments, political expediency, contempt for the Constitution and laws of Greece, and political excess of every dimension have characterized Greek politics ever since. While these evils cannot be attributed solely to his influence, Venizelos did directly undermine the very political reforms he was promoting -- we will hear more of these later -- through his fickle will, which led him to revolt, resign, or retire whenever his way was blocked. His tendency to overlook second order consequences was already emerging at this early stage of his career.

In 1896 the Cretans once again rebelled against Turkish suzerainty, demanding autonomy for Crete. Venizelos refused to join the rebels, arguing that the true objective of the Cretan people was union with Greece (*enosis*), not autonomy under nominal Turkish rule. By August of 1896 Turkish troops had begun massacring Cretan soldiers and civilians, driving Venizelos to again enter politics and join the rebellion, despite his misgivings about its ultimate purpose. Greece sent troops to support the rebels, Turkey and Greece went to war, and the Great Powers, fearing instability in the region, intervened and restored the status quo ante.

By 1897 an uneasy peace had been restored, and Venizelos was persuaded by his supporters to stand for election to the Cretan Assembly. His charisma, actions during the rebellion, and fluency as a public speaker led the other delegates to elect him President. But Venizelos was still unwilling to pursue any goal short of union with Greece, and was quickly ousted when he refused to negotiate with the Turks for Cretan autonomy. Disorder soon followed; Britain, France, and Russia again demonstrated their power in the Mediterranean and declared Crete under their control, expelling the Turkish forces from the island. They appointed Prince George, son of the Greek king George I, as governor. With the arrival of George in

December 1898 Venizelos was invited to help write a new constitution for Crete, and was subsequently appointed Councilor for Justice, where he reformed the court and police systems.

Venizelos quickly clashed with the Governor, Prince George, and soon resigned from the government. He authored an article highly critical of the Prince, and was briefly imprisoned for slandering the state. While in jail he decried the Constitution for giving too much power to the top leadership, conveniently forgetting that he was the document's principal architect.¹⁰ By 1905 the Cretan people were once again in revolt against the government, protesting George's nepotism and his participation in elections for the assembly, a role prohibited to the Governor by the Constitution. The Great Powers intervened, dispatching troops to Crete to put down the insurrection and imposing martial law. Popular support for the rebellion led to a negotiated surrender of the rebels, who were granted amnesty. Prince George was forced to resign in 1906, and Venizelos was again called on to serve the Cretan people.

Eleutherios helped draft yet another constitution, stood for office, and was acclaimed prime minister by an enthusiastic Assembly. He held Crete together for the next three years as revolution in the Ottoman Empire brought the Young Turks to power, and with them, a demand for the return to Turkey of the "detached" territories. By July 1909 Crete's relations with its neighbors and the Powers boiled over into crisis again. The protecting Powers elected to withdraw their troops to appease the Turks; the Greek flag was quickly raised on Crete, and Constantinople immediately issued an ultimatum to Athens demanding the cessation of Greek interference on the island.

The government in Athens, weak, disorganized, and bankrupt, immediately kowtowed to the Turkish demands, stirring outrage in the army, which staged a coup. Greece was now ruled by the Military League, a loose association of army officers with no real leader or philosophy

and little grasp of how to administer the country. In desperation the League invited Venizelos to Athens to become their leader, and to head the government. The Cretan accepted the first part of their offer, and upon his arrival in the capital "in a remarkable speech he told the officers who had invited him that they had really made a mess of things."¹¹

However, Venizelos declined the second offer of the Military League, that of leader of the clique and de facto head of government. Instead he proposed to declare the League a lawful administration with the proviso that it withdraw after a responsible government was installed. Elections were held -- Venizelos did not campaign, but his name was put in nomination by his friends in Crete -- and the National Assembly constituted. He won a huge victory over his opponent despite his unwillingness to woo the public. His return to Athens was marked by enormous crowds urging him to accept the Premiership. Venizelos responded, "I shall collaborate with those who want to lift Greece morally and materially to the level of the modern states and to make her the chief factor of civilization and progress in the Orient."¹² Appearing before the King, he intoned, "Your majesty, in five years I will regenerate Greece."¹³ King George, grateful for Venizelos' support of the monarchy, appointed him Prime Minister of Greece on October 18, 1910.

Venizelos' ascent to power had been truly remarkable. This 45 year old lawyer had spent only a few years (his college days) in the country he was to rule. He had been a member of Parliament for only eight weeks. He controlled no political party with which to enact his vision. He had been imprisoned by the King's son for authoring the critical article in Crete, and had led an armed uprising there against the Great Powers who controlled Greece's destiny. It was an astonishing rise.

But Venizelos had made a critical mistake in grasping the reins of power. His legitimization of the rule of the Military League equally legitimated the precedent of "a military caste, entrenched in power, consolidating and legalizing its position and then handing over power to a civil government."¹⁴ The pattern for 60 years of military coups interspersed with civilian rule had been set. Greece would pay the price for this mistake as late as the 1970's, when the revolt of the colonels repeated the precedent the Military League had established two generations earlier. Once again Venizelos' vision did not reach beyond the horizon. Believing it sufficient to reject the leadership of the League to discredit its methods, he did not see that accepting its rule as legitimate had validated the coup nonetheless. It was an ominous beginning for his entry onto the national stage.

The new prime minister quickly saw his reform agenda blocked by the entrenched interests of the old order. Unable to govern, Venizelos resigned his office after only a month in power. A public uproar ensued, the King refused to accept his resignation, and the Assembly gave him an overwhelming vote of confidence. The newly strengthened prime minister then asked King George to dissolve Parliament and call new elections, which he did. Venizelos' newly formed Liberal Party won 300 of 364 seats in the December 1910 plebiscite, and the victorious leader immediately launched his reform campaign.

The Assembly convened in January 1911 and passed a flurry of new legislation. Elementary education was made compulsory, large estates were expropriated and the land distributed to peasants, military officers were barred from serving in the Assembly, an inspector general was appointed to oversee the army, finances were reformed, an agricultural ministry was created, the legislative process was overhauled, roads and rails were contracted, and the armed forces overhauled with the assistance of foreign (French and British) advisors. Finally Venizelos

reappointed Prince Constantine, heir to the throne, as head of the military. Constantine -- who had studied military science in Germany and held a German field marshal's baton -- was widely held to be responsible for the humiliation of the Greek forces which he had led against the Turks in 1897. The Military League had ousted Constantine as commander in the prelude to Venizelos' ascension to power.

THE STATESMAN

In appointing Constantine to head the military, Venizelos apparently was attempting to demonstrate his loyalty to the dynasty (remember he had opposed Prince George, Constantine's younger brother when the latter was Governor of Crete), and to strengthen the concept of the constitutional monarchy. Strategic myopia had prevailed again. Venizelos, by restoring the Crown Prince to the army, made the institution "an instrument of royalty."¹⁵ The army and the crown became inextricably linked; Constantine's victories in the Balkan Wars a few years later would further cement this relationship. Military officers became unabashed royalists, and when the line was later drawn between Venizelos and Constantine after his ascension to the throne, they would become partisans in the struggle between the Venizelists and their opponents.

Ironically the military grumbled loudly over the appointment of Constantine, but took no action. Venizelos paralleled his rapid moves to remake the domestic situation with bold foreign policy initiatives. With Britain training his navy and France his army, the prime minister felt the time was ripe to expand Greece's borders. In May 1912 he concluded a secret alliance with Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Turks. It was a diplomatic masterstroke. The alliance -- the Great Powers thought such an arrangement impossible given the deep distrust

among the signatories -- was the first real challenge to Turkish hegemony of the European mainland since the Ottoman conquest nearly 400 years earlier.

By October 1912 war against the Turks had broken out. Foreign observers were astonished at the performance of the Alliance troops, in particular the Bulgarians and the Greeks, the latter of course headed by Prince Constantine. Greek forces surged north into Macedonia and raced towards Salonika¹⁶ while the Bulgarian army moved south in hopes of beating the Hellenes to the prize. Greece won the contest, but Bulgaria was dissatisfied with the outcome, and asked Venizelos to allow Bulgarian troops to be quartered in the city while they regrouped and resupplied. The Greek prime minister agreed, and asked King George to move to the city to reinforce Greece's claims of sovereignty. George did so, but was assassinated there in March 1913. Crown Prince Constantine -- hero of the conquest of Macedonia -- was crowned king of the Hellenes. The Turks sued for peace shortly afterwards, and the first Balkan War ended in May 1913 with Greece in control of considerable territory formerly occupied by the Ottomans.

Peace was short lived. Bulgaria quickly turned on its erstwhile allies and attacked Greece in Thrace. The Serbs came to the aid of their southern neighbors and their combined forces pushed the Bulgars back to the north and east. The Bulgarians, facing defeat, quickly called for peace talks and under the resulting Treaty of Bucharest (personally negotiated by Venizelos), Greece gained control over southern Epirus, most of Macedonia, and western Thrace.

The Balkan Wars were a resounding victory for the Greeks, the Great Idea, Venizelos, and Constantine. In two years the nation had nearly doubled in size from 25,000 to 42,000 square miles, its population had similarly increased from 2.6 million to 4.3 million, the hated Ottomans had been routed, the shame of Greek military ineptness in the 1897 war against the Turks was erased, and the Bulgarians humiliated. Realization of the Great Idea seemed

imminent. A joyful populace recalled an ancient Greek legend of Constantinople: Constantine built it, Constantine lost it, and Constantine will regain it.¹⁷ Venizelos and Constantine were hailed as the successors of the great Greeks of antiquity and the flame of irredentism was fanned to a white hot state.

Yet the victory was Pyrrhic. Venizelos had again failed to understand the full implications of his actions. Bulgaria, humiliated in defeat by an imposed settlement, would not let the scab of an unjust peace heal. Revenge tinged the thoughts of Sofia throughout the long winter of 1913. Turkey, for its part, was equally unsatisfied. Emboldened by the split between the Bulgarians and the Greeks (for Bulgaria had by far the larger army, a force known for its ferocity and fearlessness), the Moslems plotted their retaliation. Venizelos did not realize the extent of the threat on his borders, and he was to pay for his oversight in years to come.

World War I intervened before the Bulgars or Turks could exact their revenge. Venizelos, an Anglophile and admirer of Western liberalism, wished Greece to join the Triple Entente. Thus Greece would gain powerful allies in opposing Turkey and Bulgaria, and might get further concessions when those countries were defeated. Constantine -- familiar with Prussian military might from his training in Germany -- did not believe the Entente could prevail. Despite pressure from his brother-in-law the Kaiser, the Greek King declared for neutrality, correctly recognizing that Britain, ruler of the Mediterranean, would not allow strategically placed Greece to oppose its will.

At this point Venizelos made another critical mistake. Constantine, as constitutional monarch, could not legally oppose the policy of the premier. Venizelos decided to override the wishes of the king -- despite Constantine's immense popularity after his victories in the Balkans and in the face of the gravest threats to Greece's position -- and began plotting with the Allies to

bring Greece into the war on the side of the Entente. Constantine vehemently opposed Venizelos' actions, and in March 1915 the Cretan again resigned his position. Elections quickly followed, and Venizelists in the Liberal Party won a commanding majority.

Venizelos again became head of government, and initiated preparations for war against Bulgaria. Bulgaria in turn mobilized its troops on the Greek border in September 1915. The prime minister ordered Greek mobilization, but the King, still commander-in-chief of the army, demurred. Venizelos elected to resign yet again in protest. At this point the former prime minister embarked on a course which was to divide Greece for generations. Despite his own protestations of the illegal nature of the King's failure to support the position of the prime minister, he himself undertook a series of extra-constitutional measures which were to forever fracture any hope of cooperation between Greece's most popular King and her preeminent statesman.

Concerned that Serbia, whose army was engaged with Austria-Hungary, could not provide troops in the event of an attack on Greece by Bulgaria as required by the secret Greco-Serbian alliance, Venizelos sought succor elsewhere. He secretly contacted the Entente and requested that they dispatch troops to Salonika in the event of a Bulgarian attack. French and British troops landed in the city in September 1915 as a result of Venizelos' overture.

Greeks were appalled. Venizelos, apparently surprised that the Allies had acted before an attack upon Greece, condemned the Allies in Parliament, but secretly supported their action. At the same time new elections were held, which Venizelos' Liberal Party boycotted to protest the King's involvement in partisan politics. At this juncture the situation became even more complicated, if such a condition were possible. France, eager to shorten supply lines to Gallipoli and bring Greece into the war on the side of the Entente, staged a series of fake attacks on its

mission in Athens, and then used the "unrest" as an excuse to essentially occupy the country. The King, unwilling to bring his country into the war, declared a policy of "favorable neutrality" under which Greece would cooperate with the Allies but not enter the war.¹⁸ Venizelos, disgusted by these machinations, fled to Salonika via Crete and established a parallel government there, one which demanded Constantine's abdication and Greek entry into the war. Great Britain soon recognized the new regime, while France demanded that Greece turn over its fleet and much war materiel to French forces for prosecution of the war against the Triple Alliance. The weak Greek government in Athens quickly agreed, and outraged citizens sought reprisals against the Venizelists, whom they believed were assisting the French.

By June 1917 the Allies had joined Venizelos in his demand that Constantine abdicate. They imposed a naval blockade of the country to emphasize their point. The King, realizing his situation was hopeless, did so and debarked for Switzerland. His second son Alexander succeeded him to the throne, Venizelos returned to Athens to head the new Greek government, Greece entered the war on the side of the Allies, and the Venizelists sought revenge on the royalists who had supported Constantine. Venizelos did nothing to stop the vengeance of his followers.

The speed with which these events unfolded and their complexity perhaps make it is wise at this point to briefly review the vision of Eleutherios Venizelos and see where it failed. Venizelos saw the War as an opportunity to realize the Great Idea by defeating the Turks and Bulgarians -- who still occupied much of the Greek "homeland" -- through alliance with Britain, France, and Russia. In order to gain advantage for Greece after the War, Venizelos believed, it was necessary that Greek troops make a major contribution to the war effort. In that way Venizelos could claim that Greece was owed territorial concessions as a result of its support of

the allied effort. Obviously such a scenario required that Greece enter the war, but Venizelos' efforts along these lines were frustrated by the King, who was loath to pit his forces against those of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria.

Venizelos, intent upon realizing his strategic vision and contemptuous of the King's popularity, elected to force a confrontation just at the time (World War I) when Greece was threatened on all sides. Upset with Constantine -- who "had nothing of his father's suavity and culture, and neither of those two matchless virtues of a constitutional king -- no opinions and affected indifference"¹⁹ -- and the King's failure to support the prime minister's policies as required by the Constitution, Venizelos himself decided to ignore the letter and spirit of Greece's supreme law. He secretly plotted with the Allies to drag Greece into the war. He encouraged them to seek Constantine's abdication. He established an illegal parallel government in exile. He directed his Liberal Party to boycott national elections to protest the rule of the King, thus making the monarchy a political issue at the very time he was attempting to limit the King's role in politics! He did nothing when his followers rampaged against the Royalists after the Allies occupied Greece and returned Venizelos to power in Athens. In short he accepted every expedient imaginable in order to realize his strategic vision. And in so doing he established a conflict -- among the pro- and anti-royalists -- and a precedent -- of contempt for the Constitution and disregard for the orderly and lawful transfer of power -- which were to dog Greek politics for fifty years or more.²⁰

By November 1918 the war had ended, and while Greek troops had seen some action, Venizelos feared that their contribution was insufficient to wrest the range of concessions he intended to seek at the peace talks.²¹ Rather than demobilize as the other European nations were doing, Venizelos instead sent two divisions of troops to Odessa to fight the Bolsheviks along side

the French. He hoped this action would strengthen his hand in Paris, where he would represent Greece personally.

Venizelos possessed undeniable abilities as a statesman and diplomat. His distinguished manner, charisma, fluency in many languages, and gripping speeches mesmerized Europe. He was the toast of the Continent, second in influence only to Lloyd George at the peace talks when discussions turned to the future of Southeast Europe and Asia Minor. Venizelos spoke eloquently of a Greater Greece stretching across the Aegean Sea, from Thrace to Constantinople, from the Adriatic to the Black Sea: a "Greece of two continents and five seas."²²

The Greek leader asked for all of Thrace, thus depriving Bulgaria of her access to the Aegean, and Turkey of a presence in Europe. The Allies agreed. He demanded Smyrna and its hinterlands in Asia Minor; again the victors acquiesced. He called for the internationalization of Constantinople, and once more the Powers agreed. Venizelos' demands were formalized in the Treaty of Neuilly, which the former belligerents signed in November 1919.

But the demobilized Allies were unable to enforce the provisions of the treaty. Greece's troops, including those recently returned from the Ukraine, invaded Thrace and drove the Turks out of Europe by July 1920. Under the resulting Treaty of Sèvres, Greece was awarded all of Thrace to within 20 miles of Constantinople, the Gallipoli Peninsula, the north shore of the Sea of Marmora, and many Aegean islands. Athens was to administer the Smyrna district, which could be incorporated into Greece after a five-year delay. On the day the treaty was signed Italy and Greece also concluded an agreement which returned eleven of the Dodecanese islands seized by Italy to Greek control. The twelfth, Rhodes, was to be returned when Britain returned Cyprus.

THE FALL

The Great Idea had reached its high water mark. It was the "triumph of Venizelos' career."²³ But it was to be remarkably short lived. The descent began almost at once. Venizelos embarked at the Gare du Lyon for his return train journey to Athens after a two-year absence representing Greece at the peace conference. On the platform two Greek naval officers suddenly appeared out of the crowd; eight shots were fired and Venizelos fell, hit in the shoulder and thigh. His wounds were not life threatening and he was able to resume his journey after several months of recuperation.

The next blow fell soon afterwards. King Alexander, with whom Venizelos had enjoyed a harmonious relationship, died after being bitten by a pet monkey. The regent offered the throne to Prince Paul, Constantine's third son (and Alexander's younger brother). Paul deferred, stating that the throne rightly belonged to his father. Venizelos returned to Athens to a tumultuous welcome and immediately called elections.²⁴ The referendum quickly became an informal plebiscite on the future of the monarchy, with the Liberal Party of Venizelos cast in the role of republicans while the opposition gained its support from the royalists. What should have been a resounding victory for the Liberals resulted instead in abject defeat. Venizelos himself was defeated for reelection to Parliament. Like Churchill a generation later, the nation's effective wartime leader was quickly dumped when peace prevailed. The voters, it seemed, remembered the blockade, the arrests, the executions, the failure to demobilize, the campaign against the Bolsheviks, and the government in exile as much as they remembered Sèvres and Neuilly. Venizelos returned to self-imposed exile in Paris. In December a formal plebiscite on the future of the monarchy was held and Constantine returned to the throne.

Abroad the news was little better. France, which had supported Greece's bid for territory in 1919, by 1921 had shifted its allegiance to Turkey in order to protect French interests in the

Middle East. Russia, now the Soviet Union, decided to support the revolutionary Ataturk, and concomitantly punish Greece for its earlier adventurism in the Ukraine. Italy, too, feared Athens' growing strength, and shifted its support to Turkey. By 1922 Greece's efforts to impose its will in Smyrna led to war with a resurgent Turkey. Greek troops suffered defeat after defeat, and were driven from Asia Minor back across the Bosphorus to Western Thrace.

Domestic reaction was violent. A revolutionary government took over the country and purged members of the old order. King Constantine, alleged architect of the defeat, was forced from the throne into exile.²⁵ His oldest son George received the crown. Venizelos was appointed to represent Greece at the peace talks in Lausanne. He rejected Turkish demands for reparations and surrender of the Greek fleet but gained little in the negotiations. Both sides agreed to accept the current territorial boundaries -- no Greek presence in Asia Minor at Smyrna or elsewhere, Turkish control of eastern Thrace on the European continent -- and to an exchange of population. The Treaty of Lausanne was concluded in January 1923. One and a half million Greeks left Turkey to resettle among the Hellenes, while 400 thousand Turks departed Greece to rejoin their co-religionists. Bulgaria and Greece also exchanged 40 thousand citizens each at the same time.²⁶

There is considerable irony in Venizelos' failure to recognize the second order effects of his pursuit of the Great Idea. Most obvious among them was his role as chief negotiator in realization of his objective in the Treaty of Sèvres, and the identical part he played in dismantling it a few years later at Lausanne. His failure to recognize the impossibility of sustaining a Greek island at Smyrna in a sea of resurgent Turkish nationalism was equally shortsighted. Nor did he understand Greece's weariness with war -- perhaps because he was abroad so long -- and the

country's unwillingness to spill more blood to maintain a Greek presence in Asia. Neuilly and Sèvres were the equivalent of *dictats*, *ukases* handed down by victorious powers without thought of their effects on the defeated. Venizelos was fixated on achieving the Great Idea. He could not see that "from the outset it was an impossible dream. The other nationalities of the Balkans had no interest in the revival of a Greek-dominated Byzantine Empire, while the major European powers had quite different designs of their own in this part of the world."²⁷ Another writer observed that "his zeal for the occupation of Asia Minor resulted in the ashes of Smyrna."²⁸ Again the vision of Greece's great leader was shown to be myopic. It would not be the last time.

The revolving door governments which followed the defeat of Venizelos and the Liberals in 1920 did nothing to deal with Greece's growing domestic and foreign problems. The Liberals rose from the ashes of defeat in 1923, when they won 385 of 394 seats in Parliament. King George II asked Venizelos to form a government. The Cretan refused, making it known through back channels that he was unwilling to serve the monarch. George was persuaded to leave Greece and went into exile in Romania. Venizelos then assumed the premiership, but growing pressures for the creation of a republic forced him from office only 20 days later. A referendum was held in early 1924, and a republic established. Venizelos became its first president, but quickly resigned when his reform plans were thwarted. Once again he went into exile, this time for more than three years.

Greece slowly descended into political and economic collapse. One weak government followed another, with the ruling parties alternately purging their enemies from the military and civil service. The great depression made its presence known through bankruptcy and unemployment while the million odd refugees generated by Venizelos' acquiescence to the

Treaty of Lausanne languished in tent cities across the country, yet another example of his failure to foresee the consequences of his policies.

By 1928 the Greeks had had enough. Venizelos returned to Athens, was elected to Parliament, and soon formed a government. The second golden age of Venizelism (the first had been his four year rule from 1911 to 1915) was about to begin. In contrast with his first administration, which had focused largely on reforming the domestic scene, Venizelos this time chose to concentrate on Greece's foreign relations. By 1928 he had reached an understanding with Mussolini in Italy which led to increased cooperation between the two Mediterranean powers. He concluded pacts with Albania, Yugoslavia, Austria, and Hungary in quick succession. He sought rapprochement with Bulgaria, but was rebuffed. Finally in June 1930 he achieved his final triumph: reconciliation with Turkey, long Greece's chief rival in the area. Venizelos became the first Greek leader to visit Istanbul.²⁹ Formal if not warm relations followed and Greece at last was confident that the borders won during the Balkan conflicts and World War I were reasonably secure.

By 1932 passion and zeal in the 68 year old Venizelos had weakened, while a vote of no confidence forced a new election. "His promises . . . to alleviate the working and peasant classes of Greece and to compensate refugees proved sources of corruption and scandal, and led to the greater burdens which he imposed on taxpayers."³⁰ Early results showed the Liberal party slumping; a cabal of mysterious conspirators briefly tried to seize power before the coup was put down. Venizelos continued to serve in Parliament, though in a diminished role. Then on June 6, 1933, Venizelos and his second wife were returning from a dinner party in the suburbs of Athens accompanied by another car containing his bodyguards. Suddenly a third car appeared, and swerved between the limousine bearing the Liberal leader and the car containing his following

guards. The assailants opened fire with machine guns, hitting Venizelos' car 120 times. While the former prime minister was unhurt, the chauffeur was killed and Mrs. Venizelos injured.

An investigation into the affair by the ruling party produced meager results. Only continued prodding by the Liberal minority resulted in any progress. Finally, after more than a year had passed, arrests were made. A trial was scheduled, but it was never held. The charges were dismissed without explanation. No one was ever punished for the attack.

Venizelos appeared shaken by the assassination attempt. His decisiveness and judgment seemed impaired as he waffled on important issues. But he had one final role yet to play. In March 1935 Venizelos and his Liberal party helped inspire a coup against the administration, which enjoyed the support of royalist military officers who sought to restore the monarchy. After 10 days the bungled revolt was suppressed, and Venizelos again fled to France, this time involuntarily. He admitted publicly his participation in the coup; a court found him guilty of treason and sentenced him to death in absentia. The monarchy was restored, and King George II, upon resuming the throne, declared a general amnesty which included Venizelos and the other conspirators. Before he could return to Greece from Paris the old Cretan finally succumbed to the demands of nature, and died of natural causes in his sleep. He was 72 years old.

CONCLUSION

How could a man who achieved so much for his country fall so far from grace? Six times prime minister, architect of the expansion of Greece, domestic reformer, admired diplomat -- how does such a person end a career under sentence of death for treason? The reason does not lie in his pursuit of The Great Idea, for it bore all the hallmarks of a strategic vision. It was a great cause (unity of the Greek people) worthy of effort, it provided guidance (irredentism) for decisions and actions, it launched people into action (the Balkan Wars), inspired them in their

hearts, and offered everyone a stake in the outcome (an expanded nation reveling in its return to cultural glory).³¹

Rather the answer to the question of Venizelos' failure as a great leader lies in strategic myopia. Great visions cannot be viewed solely through a telescope. The territory between the visionary and his goal must be mapped using broader means. This was Venizelos' great shortcoming. The Great Idea dominated his thought, and pushed aside reflection upon the implications of its realization. The Cretan's image became so entwined with that of the Great Idea that the two could no longer be separated. Venizelos himself seems to have come to believe that no other person could lead Greece to her destiny. Thus he was able to justify the many questionable actions he took in the name of the Greek dream.

The failures of Venizelos took many forms. His willingness to seek confrontation over consensus led to regular threats of resignation. His frequent entries and exits from government set a precedent of instability which persists in Greece today. In a similar vein, Venizelos contributed to weak civilian control over the military when he legitimized an army coup by taking over leadership from the plotters and establishing a government. As a result military intervention into civilian politics became routine, further exacerbating Greek political instability. Later Venizelos would let his personal animosity towards the King mutate into an anti-royalist movement led by his party. The royalist/republican split dug the divide within Greek society to new depths, and resulted in political turmoil, murder, revenge, and the weakening of the Greek state. This great Greek leader would reform the domestic economy, not foreseeing that the changes implemented would place an even heavier burden on the rural peasants he claimed to be aiding.

The implications of the foreign machinations Venizelos engaged in equally escaped his notice. His great victories over the Turks and Bulgarians were soon reversed by the unjust peace he imposed, and by the Turkish nationalism born from defeat at the hands of the Greeks. The ill conceived Greek occupation of formerly Turkish territory in Asia Minor around Smyrna is yet another example. This dagger in the side of Turkey was sure to result in reprisal and, when the revenge was exacted, the destruction of Greece's occupying forces. Yet Venizelos did not anticipate this outcome, but only reveled in the immediate glory of victory over the Turks and realization of his strategic vision.

In reviewing his career then, we should weigh the brilliance of his many achievements against the unforeseen consequences which dulled their luster. In many ways Venizelos was a giant in the history of Greece. From his lofty height he should have seen much which would befall his country. He did not, and that is the tragedy of this life, that the memory of his many triumphs should be dulled by the corrosive effect of his frequent failures. Like all Greek tragedies, this one has a moral. A great vision can nonetheless be a narrow one. Realizing that vision has consequences, and the consequences cannot be overlooked as a necessary adjunct for the true strategist. The great strategic leader must see not only where he is going, but how getting there will affect his ability to perpetuate his achievements once they are realized. This was the failure of Venizelos. Brilliant statesman, accomplished diplomat, successful politician, inspiring speaker and leader though he was, we cannot anoint him a strategic leader.

END NOTES

¹ Venizelos' (pronounced veh nee ZEH laws) given name is also romanized as "Eleftherios" (EH lehf THEH ryaws).

² Prevelakis, p. xi.

³ Alastos, p. 1.

⁴ Holden, p. 51.

⁵ Carey, p. 57.

⁶ Shinn, p. 21.

⁷ Alastos, p. 7.

⁸ Prevalakis, p. xii.

⁹ Alastos, p. 4.

¹⁰ Alastos, p. 46.

¹¹ Kousoulas, p. 97.

¹² quoted in Alastos, p. 74.

¹³ Alastos, p. 76.

¹⁴ Alastos, p. 65.

¹⁵ Alastos, p. 90.

¹⁶ Also romanized as Salonica and today known as Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city. Salonika was also the birthplace of Mustapha Kemal, better known as Ataturk, who had entered onto the European stage as dramatically as had Venizelos.

¹⁷ Alastos, p. 129.

¹⁸ Kousoulas, p. 113.

¹⁹ Alastos, p. 117.

²⁰ Carey, p. 93.

²¹ Kousoulas, p. 116.

²² Kousoulas, p. 117.

²³ Alastos, p. 200.

²⁴ The elections should have been held in June 1919, but Venizelos deferred them, claiming he was too busy with peace negotiations to be bothered with campaigning. This was yet another example of Venizelos pursuing the Great Idea while ignoring other bases of Greek stability and power.

²⁵ He died shortly afterwards in Italy.

²⁶ Carey, p. 69.

²⁷ Kousoulas, p. 20.

²⁸ Alastos, p. 5.

²⁹ Formerly Constantinople, having been renamed by Ataturk.

³⁰ Alastos, p. 5.

³¹ Characteristics taken from USAWC Course I, lesson 1-11-S "Strategic Vision".

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